

Jennie Hodgers: A True Survivor

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Jennie Hodgers played a key role in the Civil War. Many people do not know the difference that Jennie and other women made in the war. Her story is important because, in that time, Jennie felt that disguising herself as a man was her only option for survival.

Jennie Hodgers was born in Clogherhead, Ireland, in the small village of Killybush, on December 25, 1843. After the Great Potato Famine, Ireland suffered badly. Although Jennie did not want to leave, she wanted more in her life than the few things that Killybush offered. She decided to leave Ireland for America. Jennie dressed up as a man for the trip, because she knew that she would be in danger as a woman. She took the name of Albert D.J. Cashier to further disguise herself.

Two months later her ship landed in Boston, Massachusetts. After it landed, Jennie found out that America was in a war. Not knowing what to do, she left Boston to head west. By walking and catching rides with passing wagons, Jennie reached the town of Belvidere, Illinois in July 1862.

When Jennie first reached Belvidere, she did not know what she would do. She found some jobs as a handyman and earned some good pay. Then, on August 6, 1862, Jennie decided to enlist into the army as Albert D. J. Cashier. Jennie was sent to Camp Fuller, a training camp for the army, in Rockford, Illinois. When Jennie arrived, she was put in the Ninety-Fifth Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Over the next three years, Jennie's regiment took part in forty battles, including the Battle of Vicksburg, and marched over 10,000 miles. On August 17, 1865, Jennie

was released from the army with an honorable discharge. No one had ever found out her real identity.

After she was discharged, Jennie traveled back to Belvidere, Illinois. She worked odd jobs there for four years before packing up again and headed to Saunemin, Illinois. Jennie got a job there with the Cording family. In return for meals and a place to sleep, she did odd jobs for them. After a couple of months, she took a job with a farmer. The farmer built a single-room cottage for her on his property. Jennie did jobs as a farmhand, handyman, sheep and cattle herder, and the lamplighter for Saunemin. She had to light the lamps at night and put them out in the morning.

Jennie was a citizen in Saunemin for almost fifty years. In 1910, she suffered from a severe case of stomach cramps from her own poor cooking. After not seeing anything of Jennie for several days, Mrs. Patricia Lannon, a good friend of Jennie's, went to her cottage to see if anything was wrong. When Patricia got there, she discovered Jennie lying in bed in pain. Patricia then called a nurse out to treat Jennie. When the nurse was treating her, she discovered that Jennie was really a woman but was asked not to tell anybody. Patricia Lannon and the nurse were the first ones to find out that Jennie was not really a man.

A little while later, Jennie worked for Illinois State Senator Ira M. Lish as a handyman. While Lish was backing his car out of the garage one day, he hit Jennie and ran over her leg, breaking it. When a doctor was called out to fix the leg, the doctor discovered that Jennie was not a man. While Jennie's leg was mending, Senator Lish decided to admit Jennie to the Soldier and Sailor's Home in Quincy, Illinois. This decision was made because Jennie could no longer take care of herself.

At the home, a few doctors and workers were told Jennie was a woman, but they were asked not to tell anybody and to keep it a secret. While Jennie was at the home, her physical and mental health began to fade. When getting a bath from two workers one day, they discovered her true identity. Not knowing to keep it a secret, more people came to know she was really a man.

On March 28, 1914, Jennie was transferred to Watertown State Hospital near Jacksonville, Illinois. This hospital was an insane asylum. By this time, Jennie was considered totally disabled and insane.

When Jennie arrived at Watertown, she was placed in the women's ward. She was forced to wear dresses and women's attire for the first time in fifty years. Day after day, Jennie's condition worsened. On October 10, 1915, Jennie passed away in her sleep.

Jennie was buried with full military honors in her uniform and laid to rest in a casket with America's colors. Her grave was in Senator Lish's family burial grounds at Sunny Slope Cemetery in Saunemin. Her headstone was inscribed as:

Albert D.J. Cashier
Co. G 95th Ill. Inf.

In conclusion, Jennie Hodgers will be remembered for her courage, ability to cope with hard situations, and to overcome great obstacles in life. Women today are fortunate that they can serve their country and their fellow citizens just as they are, a woman. But Jennie should also be remembered because she was the first woman in Illinois to vote, the only woman to ever serve in the Civil War for the whole entire time that her unit served, and she was the only woman to receive a pension for her service in the war. Jennie Hodgers was a true survivor. [From L.P. Dawson, Also Known as Albert D.J. Cashier; "When Jennie Comes Marching Home", www.lib.niu.edu/1994/ihy940230.html (Sept. 5, 2008); Vicksburg National Military Park, "Only by Accident," www.nps.gov/archive/vick/visctr/sitebltn/only_by.htm (Sept. 5, 2008); and "Reclaiming Transgender Lives," www.public.iastate.edu/~leibert/MA_Al_Cashier.pdf (Sept. 5, 2008).]